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# Near East and South Asia Review

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7 September 1990

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Near East and  
South Asia Review

7 September 1990

Page

Articles

Egypt: Counting Even More on Syria

Cairo's quest for Arab partners to help counteract Iraqi aggression is likely to lead to shifts in alliances in the Arab world that will include warmer relations between Egypt and Syria. Closer bilateral cooperation might lead Cairo to be more sensitive to Syrian foreign policy concerns on the Arab-Israeli peace process.

Afghanistan: Kabul Searching for Friends, Influence, and Aid

Kabul's national reconciliation plan has failed to expand grassroots support for the regime, but it has succeeded in securing increased international recognition. In his quest for international legitimacy President Najibullah has placed particular emphasis on efforts to develop relations with nonaligned nations.

Politics in India's Northeast

The struggle for political power in India's northeast between the Congress Party and regional parties often produces short-lived and ineffective state governments. This political upheaval is likely to worsen and prevent state governments from dealing with the region's festering insurgencies, illegal immigrants, and economic underdevelopment.

Briefs:

Iran: Keenan's Release a Victory for Rafsanjani

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September 1990

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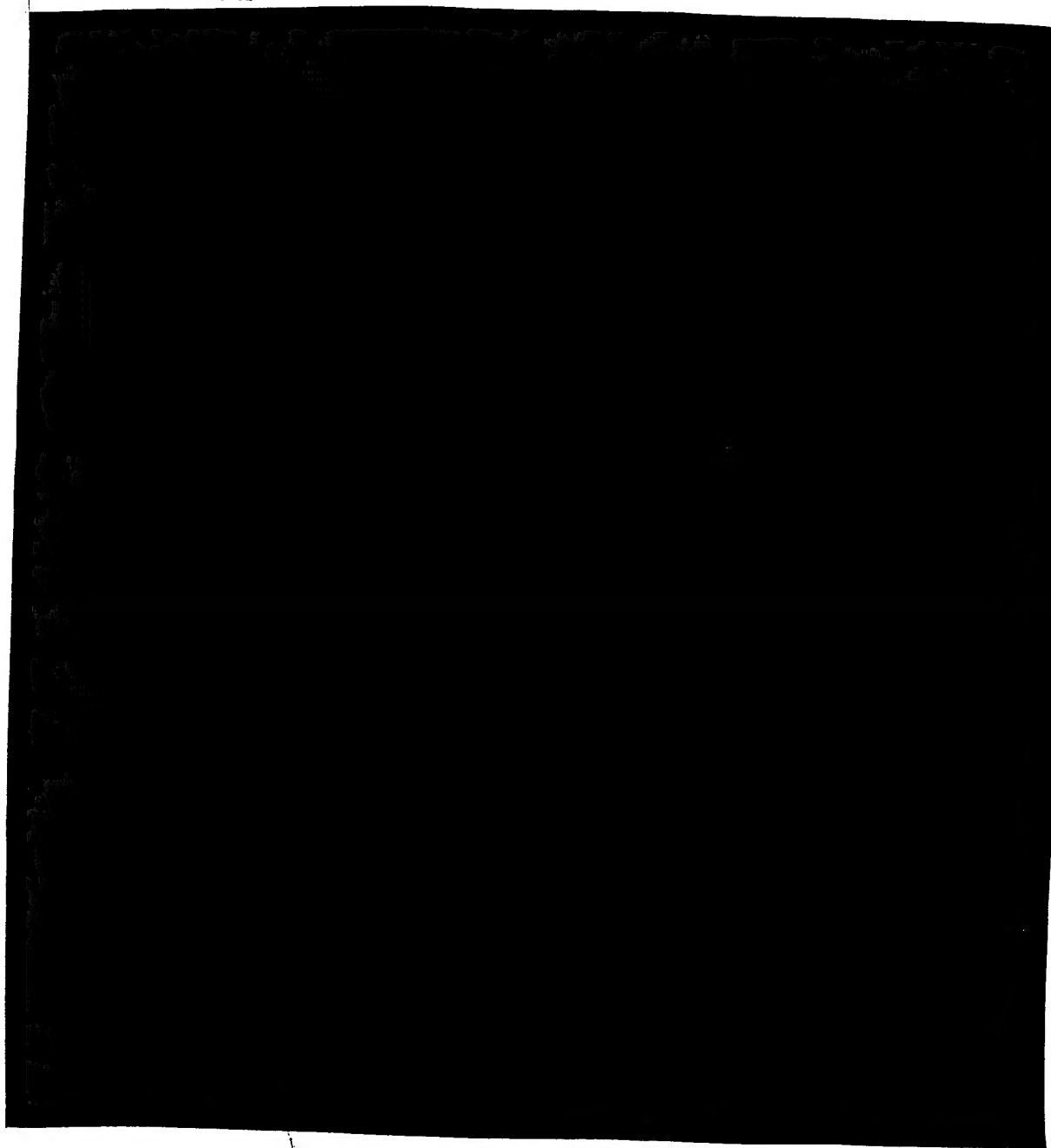
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Near East and  
South Asia Review

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Articles

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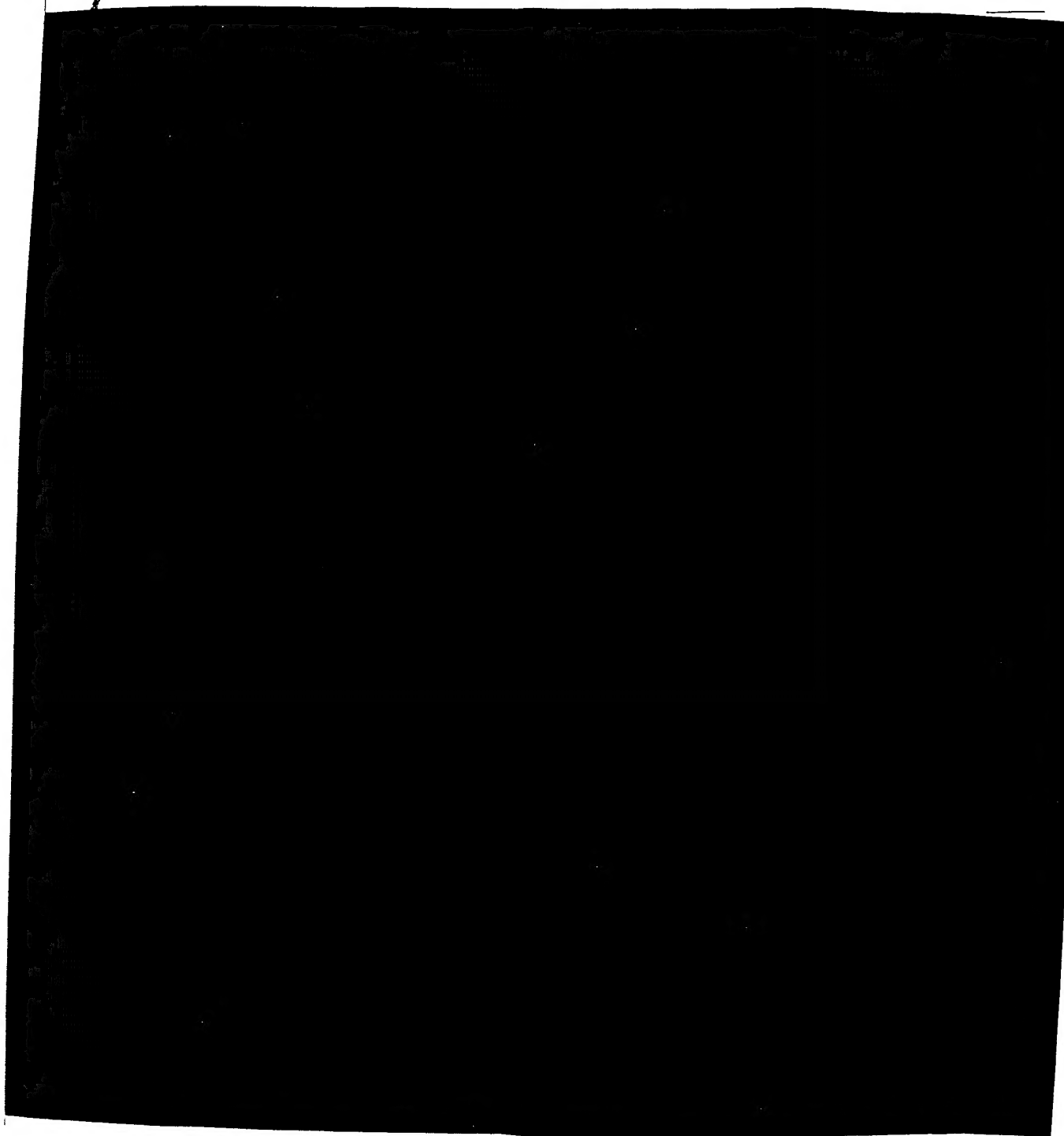
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7 September 1990

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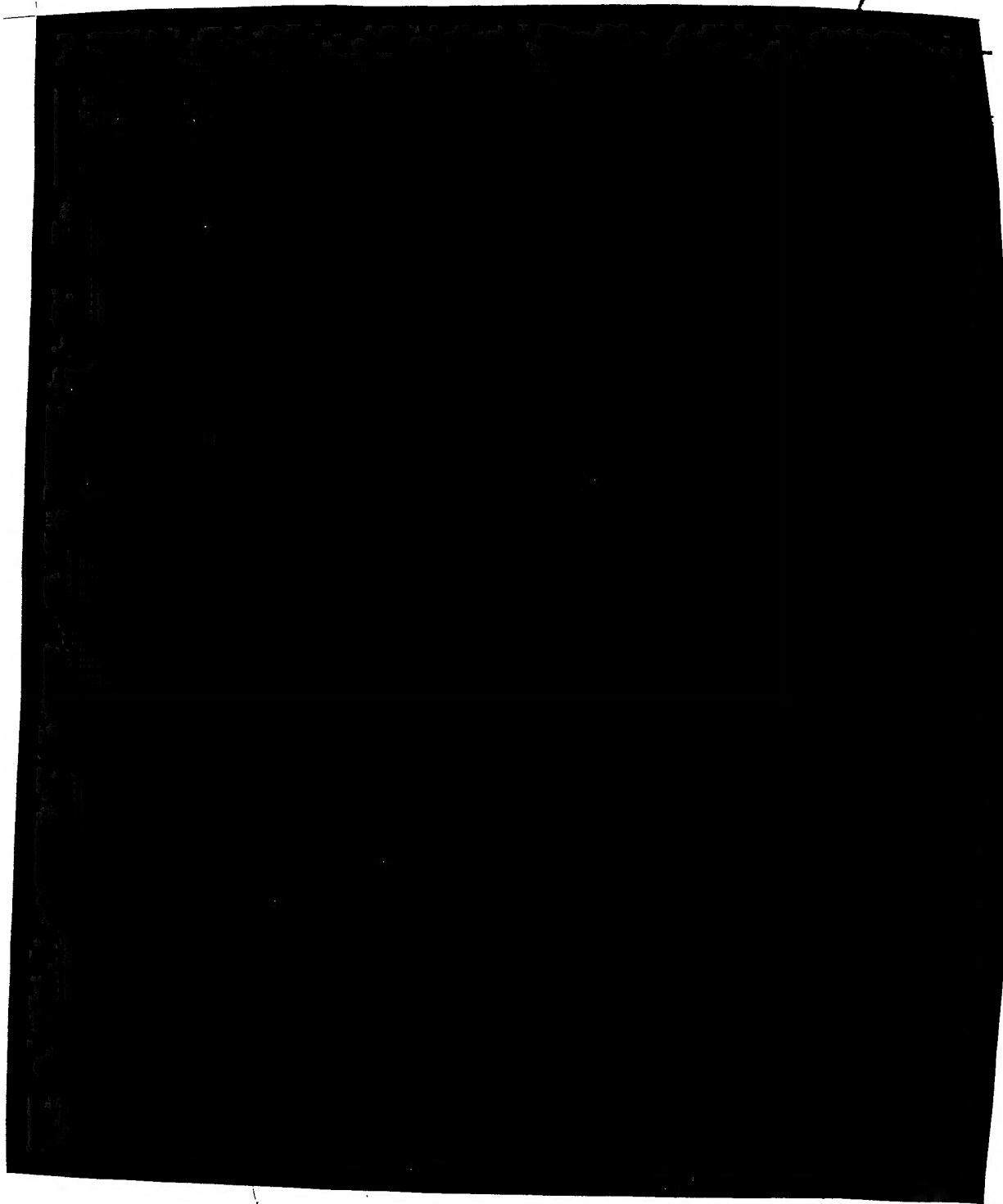
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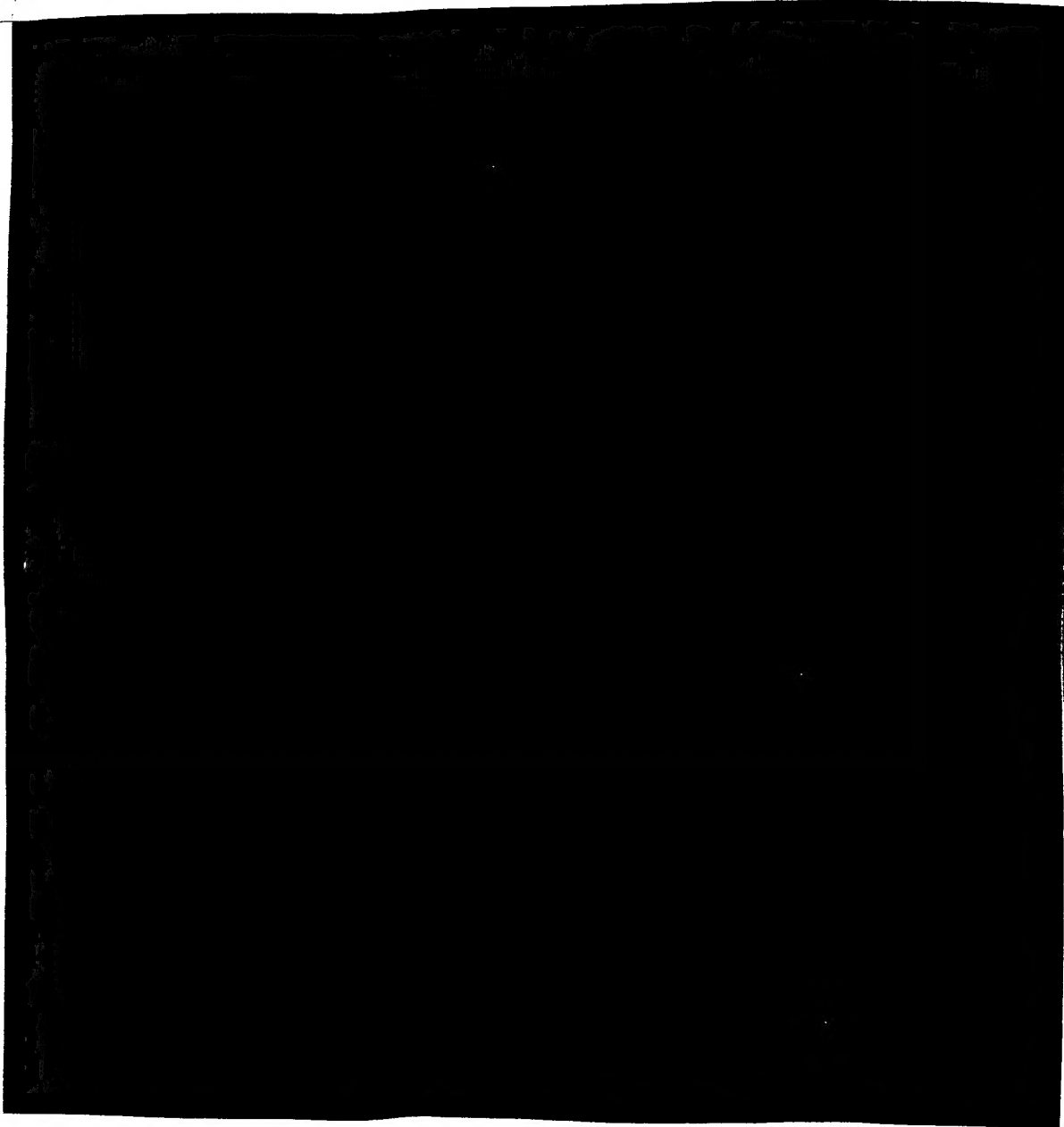
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## Egypt: Counting Even More on Syria **b3**

Cairo's quest for Arab partners to help counteract Iraqi aggression is likely to lead to shifts in alliances in the Arab world that will include warmer relations between Egypt and Syria. Egypt had begun strengthening its ties to Syria even before Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in an effort to check Baghdad's influence in the competition between Cairo and Baghdad for Arab leadership. With both Egypt and Syria having strongly condemned Iraq and sent troops to Saudi Arabia as part of the Arab defense force, the two probably will move closer on other foreign policy issues. Closer bilateral cooperation and the removal of the threat of further Iraqi aggression might lead Cairo to be more sensitive to Syrian foreign policy concerns on the Arab-Israeli peace process.

### **b3** My Friend, My Enemy, My Ally: A History of Shifting Relations

In the 1960s a common interest in confronting Israel united Egypt and Syria, while Syrian hostility to Egypt's peace treaty with Israel divided them in the late 1970s. Of all the Arab leaders, we believe Asad felt the most personally betrayed by the peace treaty because it ignored the interests of other Arab frontline states and left Damascus alone and poorly defended against Israel. Until the early 1980s Syria benefited in its drive to isolate Egypt by becoming a major recipient of Saudi financial aid and Soviet military assistance.

By the time Syria agreed last December to resume full diplomatic relations with Egypt, Cairo had reestablished relations with most Arab states and Syria had become isolated. Along with using its renewed ties to Egypt to rejoin the Arab mainstream, we believe Damascus sought to pursue its aims regarding the Arab-Israeli conflict from within the Arab fold rather than outside it.

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President Asad's visit to Alexandria in July, which was preceded by President Mubarak's trip to Damascus in

May, was important because it signified Syria's recognition of Egypt's reintegration into the Arab world.

### **b1 b3** Invasion Likely To Promote Convergence of Interests

Iraq's invasion of Kuwait has removed one of Egypt's basic concerns about moving too quickly with Damascus and, in our view, increases the possibility of even stronger ties between them over the next year. Egypt and Syria apparently have concluded that the challenge from Baghdad threatens their security and have decided to close ranks against Iraq. Mubarak has looked to Asad as a key ally in his effort to get Saddam back into line. Asad publicly supported Mubarak's attempt in July to mediate the dispute between Iraq and Kuwait and his efforts since the invasion to marshal Arab leaders' support for condemning Iraq and sending Arab forces to Saudi Arabia.

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At the emergency Arab League summit meeting in Cairo in mid-August where Mubarak pushed through the resolution creating the pan-Arab force,

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Damascus also announced it will pay the expenses of Egyptian workers returning home from Iraq and Kuwait while they are traveling through Syria.

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Egypt and Syria both have strong tactical reasons for banding together to counter Baghdad's threat. For Egypt, Iraq's aggression poses the most immediate challenge because it threatens to undermine Cairo's fundamental Arab policies of moderation. Self-interest undoubtedly is driving Syrian cooperation, and Damascus almost certainly expects to gain US and Saudi good will along with financial benefits for its assistance. Iraq's peace initiative with Iran may be giving Syria more cause for concern because Damascus would not want Iran to adopt a neutral position toward

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7 September 1990 **b1**

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Iraq and abandon joint efforts to undermine the Iraqi regime. [REDACTED] b3

Personal motives also may be contributing to the strong positions Mubarak and Asad are taking against Saddam. Asad has long hated Saddam, and Iraq's invasion of Kuwait gives weight to the Syrian leader's longstanding distrust of Saddam's intentions, provides ex post facto justification for Syrian support to Iran in the Iran-Iraq war, and helps extricate Syria from its isolation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

#### Clarer Ties Mean Gains and Risks for Mubarak

Close cooperation between Egypt and Syria in the Gulf crisis is not likely to remove Mubarak's basic distrust of Asad. Mubarak, nevertheless, may consider formal political or military alliances with Damascus to achieve a tactical advantage. Syria probably would reciprocate in view of the current turmoil in the region. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

We believe Egypt and Syria will work closely through the Arab League on policies of mutual interest and expand economic cooperation. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Syria undoubtedly has put aside concerns about the threat from the Arab Cooperation Council because Iraq's invasion of Kuwait has torpedoed Egyptian-Iraqi cooperation in that body. [REDACTED]

Egypt almost certainly would want Syria to broker improved relations with Iran if Mubarak concludes such a move could help counter Iraq's recent peace initiative with Tehran. [REDACTED] Syria already has undertaken some mediation between Cairo and Tehran. [REDACTED] b3

Mubarak undoubtedly hopes Asad will look to Egypt as a representative in Arab-Israeli forums. With the

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Arab-Israeli dispute eclipsed by the Gulf crisis and the Arab-Israeli peace process stalled, a major point of contention between Egypt and Syria has been removed.

[REDACTED]

For Egypt, the outcome of the Gulf crisis will have a major impact on its drive for regional leadership and its relations with other Arab states. Mubarak undoubtedly envisions stronger relations with Syria as furthering Egyptian foreign policy objectives. For now, we believe

Egypt and Syria will focus on containing Iraq [REDACTED] b1  
[REDACTED] b3  
[REDACTED] b1

Should Saddam Husayn be forced to stand down in the Gulf crisis, Asad might press Mubarak to adopt positions more in keeping with Syrian foreign policy, including a harder line toward the Arab-Israeli peace process. We believe in these circumstances Cairo would still want to guide the relationship but would be readier to listen to Syrian concerns about regional issues. [REDACTED] b3  
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## Afghanistan: Kabul Searching for Friends, Influence, and Aid

Kabul's national reconciliation plan—announced in January 1987 as an effort to bring peace and tranquility to Afghanistan—has failed to expand grassroots support for the regime, but it has succeeded in securing increased international recognition. Important insurgent commanders and resistance political figures have denounced the plan. Moreover, refugees are not returning home in significant numbers to participate in the national reconciliation process. Since the Soviet withdrawal, President Najibullah has expanded the basic plan, making it a useful propaganda and political tool to justify the regime's policies and actions. Najibullah is trying to soften the ruling party's image by focusing on Afghan nationalism and Islamic principles.

### International Reaction

Najibullah has left few stones unturned in his quest for international legitimacy. He has placed particular emphasis on efforts to develop relations with nonaligned nations. Earlier this summer he asked for Soviet help in obtaining support for rejoining the Islamic Conference Organization. In late July the regime lobbied for a shared seat with the insurgents' interim government at the Islamic Conference Organization meeting in Cairo, but delegates to the meeting refused to consider the proposal. In recent interviews Najibullah has invited Egypt and France, which recently reopened its Embassy in Kabul, to play a role in a political settlement.

Najibullah is using appeals to international economic institutions to enhance the regime's international credibility. Faced with burgeoning budget and trade deficits, depleted foreign reserves, a rapidly depreciating currency, and high inflation, the regime is trying to supplement the Soviet economic aid it receives. Kabul is seeking assistance from the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the Asian Development Bank, suggesting that Najibullah fears a possible reduction or cutoff of Soviet aid.

Najibullah has also requested UN assistance with the return and resettlement of refugees, establishment of a mineclearing program, and reconstruction.

Foreign Minister Wakil met with UN Coordinator for Afghanistan Sadruddin Agha Khan in late August in Geneva to gain support for regime efforts to obtain international economic assistance for Afghanistan. Wakil requested Sadruddin's assistance in soliciting "unfulfilled pledges" at the next UN General Assembly session and stressed the importance of identifying new donors. Wakil also asked Sadruddin, who declined the request, to arrange for Najibullah to meet with European Community and other potential donors to discuss future assistance for Afghanistan.

In its lobbying for international financial assistance the Kabul regime is linking the need for increased aid to the repatriation of refugees and the reconstruction of the country. The regime has publicized the return of refugees — only a small percentage are returning — as evidence that Afghans support its national reconciliation initiative and as justification for increased international economic aid. Kabul would use any increase in international assistance as further evidence of its legitimacy and the success of its national reconciliation policy.

### Domestic Maneuvering

Within the last year President Najibullah has made several cosmetic attempts to increase the regime's appeal, but he has not convinced any major resistance figure — nor the opposition within his own party — to join the reconciliation campaign. Recently the ruling party held its second congress and unanimously reelected Najibullah as chairman of the renamed Homeland Party. Last spring Najibullah appointed Fazl Haq Khaliqyar, who does not belong to the party, as prime minister and subsequently convened a *loya jirga* (national assembly), which gave Khaliqyar a vote of confidence. The *loya jirga* also approved several nationalistic amendments to the Constitution. Najibullah announced that members of the ruling party no longer had "privileged status" in the country and

~~Secret~~

7 September 1990

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ordered the addition of the word "Islam" to the party's charter. Najibullah ostensibly lifted the state of emergency—instituted after the Soviet withdrawal—although [REDACTED] a curfew is still in effect and that life has not changed for civilians. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED]

Moreover, insurgents are being allowed to enter regime-controlled cities to visit relatives or city bazaars after leaving their weapons at perimeter security posts to be retrieved when they leave. The regime has taken these steps primarily in Kandahar, Nimruz, Herat, and Ghazni Provinces. [REDACTED]

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#### Economic Enticements

The regime is continuing its efforts to broaden its local support through reconstruction projects in the countryside and by encouraging refugees to return home. The regime has offered to return confiscated private property, exempt refugees from taxes and fines, and postpone their military service obligation for six months. [REDACTED]

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It has also promised to provide job opportunities through small-scale public works projects. [REDACTED] a broad public works program is being undertaken in Kandahar, and money is being disbursed to citizens seeking to rehabilitate shops, homes, or mosques. Moreover, the regime is offering \$5 a day to construction workers to undertake the public works projects. Najibullah has offered to facilitate the United Nations' delivery of reconstruction assistance to areas controlled by both the Kabul regime and the resistance—probably a political ploy to win support in the countryside. [REDACTED]

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The regime has made varying claims of the number of refugees returning under the aegis of its national reconciliation policy. [REDACTED] the

number at more than 150,000. [REDACTED]

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For example, some Western journalists were invited by the regime to visit a guest house for returning refugees in mid-1988. Upon arrival some journalists became suspicious when they noticed that refugees having bandages changed were not actually wounded. [REDACTED]

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The regime has charged that Iran and Pakistan are preventing refugees from returning in an attempt to explain the limited number of returnees. The regime is portraying the United Nations' recently initiated pilot repatriation program as part of Kabul's national reconciliation policy, hoping to take credit for any returnees. [REDACTED]

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#### Outlook

Although there are opportunities to enhance the regime's support through its national reconciliation policy, Najibullah lacks the resources to pursue these avenues. His adept use of propaganda may attract a small following, but the bombing of civilian areas probably will continue to harden the resolve of most resistance fighters. [REDACTED]

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The Kabul regime is unlikely to entice many refugees to return until the security situation becomes more stable. Refugees regularly cite the continuation of the Kabul regime in power, the fighting in the Afghan countryside, and landmines as major factors impeding their return. Nevertheless, we believe Kabul will continue to seek help from the United Nations and other foreign donors to fund its refugee resettlement plan, hoping to project the appearance of international legitimacy and to extend its staying power. Control over the distribution of the relatively small amounts of aid likely to be channeled through Kabul by multilateral organizations will not significantly enhance the regime's survivability or support, in our view. [REDACTED]

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## Politics in India's Northeast

The struggle for political power in India's northeast between the Congress Party and regional parties often produces short-lived and ineffective state governments unable to concentrate on solving the area's problems. The Janata Dal is challenging the Congress Party's role as the dominant national political party in the northeast, but regional parties are also powerful and control several state governments. Political opportunism creates new parties and shifting alliances and coalitions. This political upheaval is likely to worsen and prevent state governments from dealing with the region's festering insurgencies, illegal immigrants, and economic underdevelopment.

### Background

India's northeast comprises the states of Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, and Tripura. With few members in Parliament, the region and its leaders have little national political clout. Nevertheless, political parties throughout India view the outcome of state elections and the rise and fall of state governments in the region as indicators of how they are faring on a national level. Political parties, therefore, put considerable energy and resources into politics in the northeast to bolster their national position.

### Players in the Northeast

The Congress Party is the only national party with a significant presence throughout the northeast. It won all 10 of the region's contested Parliament seats in November 1989, heads two state governments with an absolute majority, heads another with the support of a regional party, and is a coalition partner in a fourth. We believe the Congress Party's dominance of successive governments in New Delhi, with control over political patronage and allocation of funds in the northeast, gave it an organizational advantage over other parties in the region.

Other national parties have gained a foothold in the northeast. The Communist Party of India (Marxist) is powerful in Tripura, which it governed for two long stretches between 1945 and 1985. The Janata Dal—the leading party in the ruling National Front coalition in

New Delhi—is seeking to increase its support in the area. The opposition People's Party in Arunachal Pradesh transformed itself into the Janata Dal last spring, and an opposition party in Mizoram is considering merging with the state Janata Dal. In addition, the Janata Dal persuaded the ruling party of Assam, the Asom Gana Parishad, to join the National Front before last November's parliamentary election.

The Congress Party's principal political opponents—and sometime allies—in the northeast are regional parties. There are over 45 of these parties, many formed along tribal or ethnic lines, such as the Amra Bangali, which promotes ethnic Bengali interests in Tripura. Regional parties control four northeast state governments. Local parties in the same state often cooperate or even merge at times. Separate regional parties in the different states do not cooperate, although their broader interests—protecting ethnic and tribal rights and promoting economic development in the region—are the same.

Despite its impressive showing in last November's parliamentary election, the Congress Party has suffered setbacks in the northeast this year. In Meghalaya the Congress Party chief minister was forced to resign in March when the regional party backing his coalition pulled out, possibly at the urging of the Janata Dal.

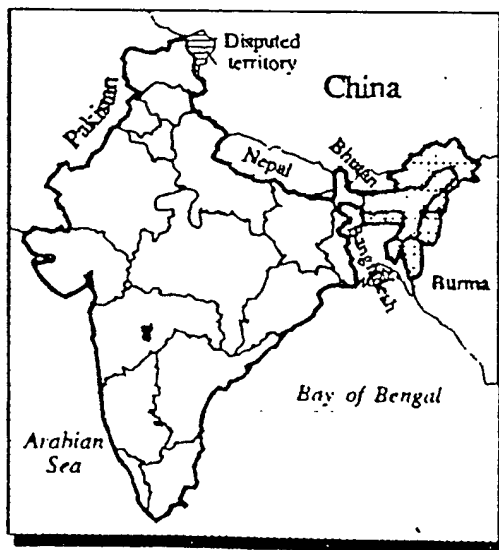
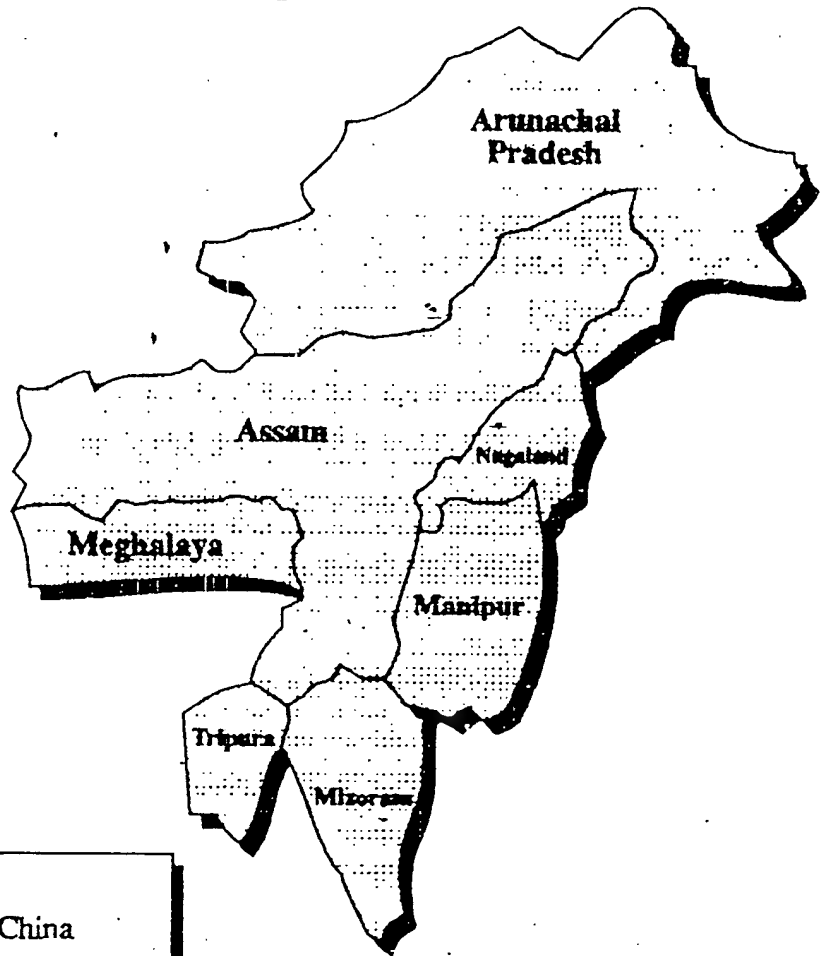
In the February state election in Manipur, a coalition of local parties combined to oust the Congress Party, which had ruled the state for a decade. Even the Congress Party's win in Arunachal Pradesh in the February state election was due to the chief minister's political savvy rather than to the party's appeal.

### Political Skulduggery

Politics in several of India's northeast states are marked by regular upheaval. Parties split, coalitions collapse, and alliances shift as individuals and factions seek to obtain power. In the 1988 Meghalaya state election, the Congress Party won the largest bloc of seats in the state assembly but not enough to form a government on its own. Opportunistic former Chief Minister

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# India's Northeast



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# India's Northeast: Political Parties' Representation in State Assemblies and Parliament

STATE	STATE PARTIES	SEATS IN STATE ASSEMBLY	CHIEF MINISTER	SEATS IN PARLIAMENT	COMMENTS *
Assam	Assam Gana Parishad	65	Prafulla Kumar Mahanta	2	Assam's 14 seats in Parliament remain unfilled until the controversy over the state's electoral rolls is resolved.
	Plain Tribals Council of Assam	21			
	Congress Party	25			
	Congress (S)	4			
	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	2			
	Independents	9			
Arunachal Pradesh	Congress Party	37	Gegong Apang	2	The People's Party transformed itself into the Janata Dal prior to the February state election. Five independents support the state government.
	Janata Dal	11			
	Janata Party	1			
	Independents	11			
Manipur	Manipur People's Party	11	Rajkumar Randbir Singh	2	Singh heads the United Legislature Front, a coalition of all parties in the Assembly except the Congress Party.
	Janata Dal	11			
	Congress (S)	6			
	Communist Party of India	3			
	Nuki National Assembly	2			
	National People's Party	1			
	Congress Party	28			
Meghalaya	Meghalaya United	32	Brington Buhai Lyngdoh	2	
	Parliamentary Party				
	Congress Party	22			
	Others	8			
Mizoram	Congress Party	22	Lalthanhawla	1	Lalthanhawla is a former member of the Mizo National Front.
	Mizo National Front	14			
	Mizo National	2			
	Front (Democratic) People's Conference	2			
Nagaland	Congress Party	36	Vamuzo	1	Vamuzo heads the Joint Legislature Party, which is composed of 24 Congress Party and 18 Nagaland People's Conference members.
	Nagaland People's Conference	24			
Tripura	Congress Party	24	S. R. Mazumdar	2	Congress Party governs in coalition with the TLUJ.
	Tripura Upajati Juba	7			
	Bangha (TLUJ)				
	Communist Party of India (Marxist)	28			
	Independents	2			

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Lyngdoh—whose 1983 government lasted only 28 days—led a faction of the opposition Hill People's Union into a coalition with the Congress Party, creating the United Meghalaya Parliamentary Union. Lyngdoh gained a high government position. Two years later Lyngdoh engineered the collapse of the state government, created a new party—the Meghalaya United Parliamentary Party—and regained the chief ministership. b3

Political opportunism in Nagaland this spring brought down two governments in less than five weeks. In May, 12 Congress Party members of the Legislative Assembly quit the 16-month-old government and joined with the opposition Nagaland People's Conference to form the United Legislature Front. All 12 received positions in the new state government. Less than a month later, 15 legislators from the National People's Conference withdrew their support from the new government and allied with the Congress Party to form the Joint Legislature Party. b3

b3 Even where state governments have been relatively stable in recent years, political maneuvering continues. Although the Congress Party chief minister of Arunachal Pradesh, Gegong Apang, has held office for almost a decade, former Congress Party Chief Minister Thungon is working to unseat him. b3 In Assam, Chief Minister Mahanta expanded his Cabinet this past January—picking up ministers he had sacked earlier because of corruption—to strengthen his hand against party rival and then state Home Minister Phukan. Phukan resigned on 1 August over the state government's handling of deteriorating law and order in the state. b3

#### Consequences of Political Upheaval

b3 Political infighting and opportunism undermine parliamentary politics in the northeast, in our view. Although state leaders revel in political infighting, the people of the northeast are weary of it. Even before Nagaland's political upheaval last spring, Nagas were losing interest in state politics. b3 and the latest events probably further alienated them. In Arunachal Pradesh some People's Party members were dismayed by their party's overnight transformation into the Janata Dal during the 1990 state

election campaign and refused to run as Janata Dal candidates. b3

Time, effort, and money committed to political survival prevent leaders and their parties from focusing on the region's principal problems—insurgencies, economic underdevelopment, and illegal immigration from neighboring countries. While Chief Minister Mahanta and Home Minister Phukan maneuvered for political support in Assam, the United Liberation Front of Assam insurgency mushroomed. Low-level insurgencies plague most other northeastern states, and political horsetrading in state capitals probably boosts the appeal of these militant groups. It is difficult for short-lived governments to implement strategies to boost agricultural or industrial development or handle immigration issues, such as the illegal presence of tens of thousands of Bangladeshis searching for jobs in the northeast. b3

#### Outlook

Political upheaval in India's northeast is likely to worsen. With the Janata Dal increasingly active in the region and the Congress Party seeking local victories to reassert itself nationally, short-lived state governments could collapse even more quickly. Assam is the next state in the northeast scheduled, probably this year, for a state election. The Congress Party recently replaced its state party leader and is in a good position to topple the ruling Asom Gana Parishad. Prime Minister Singh's Janata Dal is likely to campaign extensively for its National Front ally because a loss in Assam would be a blow to the Janata Dal nationally. With several local and national parties active in the state, voters may not give any party a majority in the legislature and may set in motion the political maneuvering so common in the northeast. b3

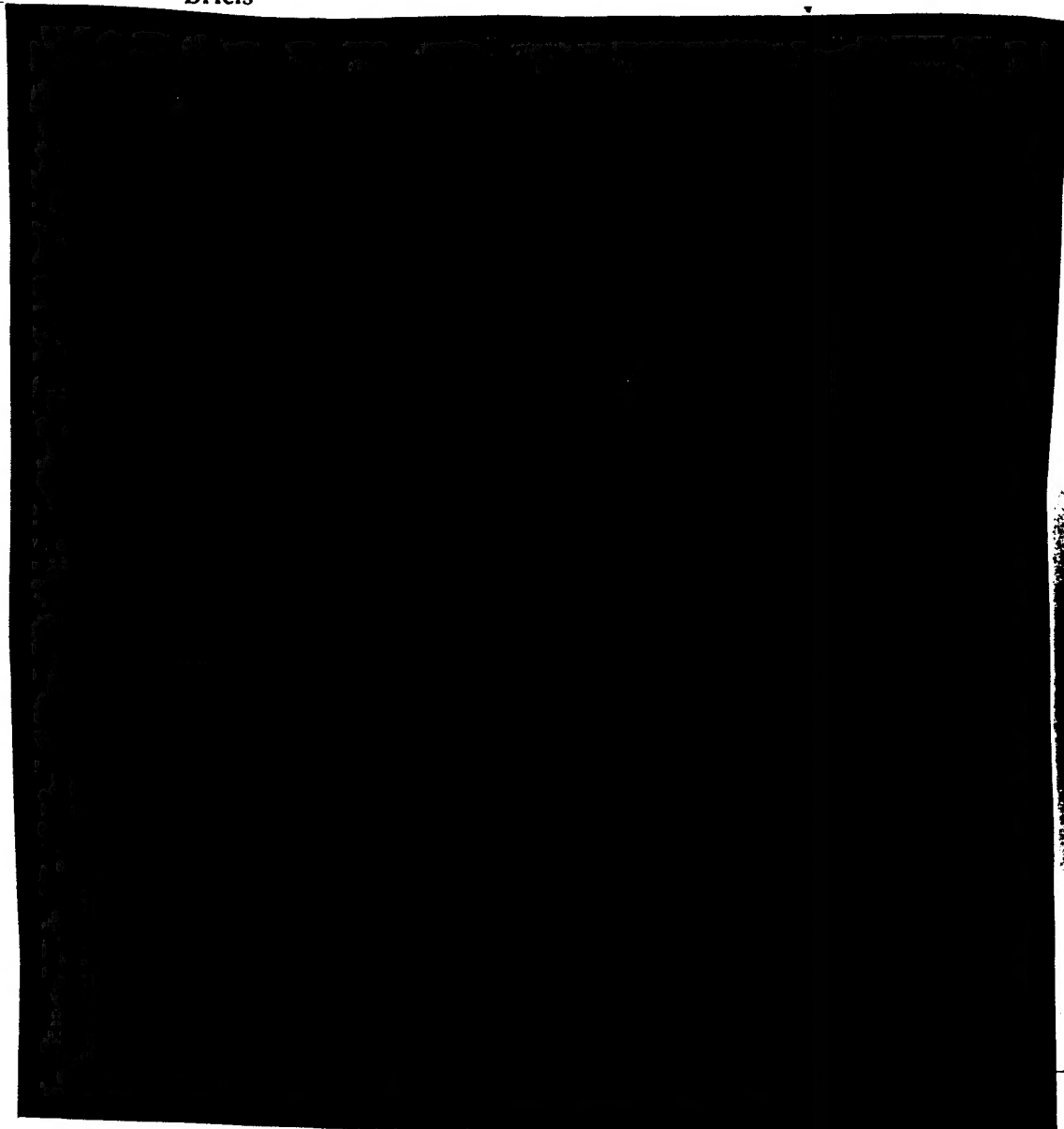
The growing inability of northeast state governments to deal with the pressing problems of the region could cause New Delhi to dismiss state governments. New Delhi threatened such action in Assam in mid-August. This could further disillusion the people of the northeast and increase the appeal of insurgent groups. b3 b3

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Near East and  
South Asia Review

Briefs



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b3

~~Secret~~

September 1990

b3

~~Secret~~

Iran

Keenan's Release a Victory for Rafsanjani

The release on 24 August of Irish hostage Brian Keenan is a victory for Iranian President Rafsanjani's efforts to resolve the problem of the hostages in Lebanon and to improve economic relations with the West. A Beirut group calling itself Islamic Dawn—probably a cover name for a Hizballah element—claimed credit for releasing Keenan, who was abducted from West Beirut in April 1986. We believe the Irish Government's announcement on the day of Keenan's release that it would send the Minister for Agriculture to Tehran to conclude a \$58 million beef sale satisfied Tehran's demands for "reciprocal good will."

The hostages have been a major obstacle to ending Iran's international isolation and attracting foreign investment. Rafsanjani's ability to get them released has depended on demonstrating to Iranian hardliners that this will bring tangible benefits. He probably sought to capitalize on Ireland's membership in the European Community as well as the intense domestic pressure on Dublin to renew commercial ties to Iran to help revive its slumping economy, particularly the beef exports devastated by the international embargo imposed on Iraq.

The assertion in the Iranian press that "the situation of European hostages can be different" from US hostages is probably meant to entice other European countries to follow the Irish example.

Rafsanjani

conditioned Iran's purchase of beef on the visit to Tehran of the Irish Minister for Agriculture. The Iranian President almost certainly will seek to capitalize on evolving European Community policy to expand Tehran's economic ties to Europe.

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